

Youth Hunting Opportunities in North Dakota

By Greg Freeman

State lawmakers decided earlier this year to add another option for youth hunters in North Dakota, this time by providing licenses to first-time spring wild turkey hunters ages 15 and younger.

Increasing opportunities for our state's young hunters was a common theme during the past legislative session, said Terry Steinwand, State Game and Fish Department director.

"The Governor, the majority of lawmakers and state wildlife managers agree that we want to see more opportunities and reduced hurdles for young hunters to enter the field," Steinwand said. "The challenge is truly understanding the existing opportunities, current and future trends, contributing factors, and the relationships of all these to know what regulation changes and new programs or initiatives will actually make a difference toward increasing and keeping kids, as well as young adults, in hunting and other outdoor activities."

Team the guaranteed chance to hunt turkeys in spring – previously young hunters had to participate in the lottery – with other hunting opportunities available, it's clear that now is a good time for a young hunter in North Dakota.

"Our small game and waterfowl hunting seasons exclude no one," said Greg Link, Game and Fish Department assistant wildlife division chief, regarding age stipulations. "Consequently, these youth-only seasons are good tools to encourage youngsters to spend more time in the field. The time to start a young hunter is left up to the parent or guardian. They have to determine whether the young hunter is mature enough to be in the field with a firearm."

North Dakota allows youth under age 12 to hunt small game and waterfowl with the appropriate license as long as they are accompanied by a parent or guardian. At 12, the hunter must pass a certified hunter education course to obtain a hunting license in North Dakota.

"Our Department believes special opportunities like youth seasons are an excellent way for young people to be exposed to the traditions of hunting. All these young people will make a decision at some point in their lives whether to participate in hunting or not," said Randy Kreil, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief. "If they have a positive experience during a youth season they may opt to continue hunting instead of drifting out of touch with the natural world. The loss of connection with the natural world has serious implications for the future of wildlife management in this country and state wildlife agencies need to make addressing this issue a top priority."



RON WILSON

North Dakota's youth-only pheasant season is in its third year.

Youth Waterfowl Hunting

The two-day youth waterfowl season is held on a weekend in mid-September. Legally licensed resident and nonresident youth waterfowl hunters ages 15 and younger are allowed to hunt ducks, coots, mergansers and geese statewide. An adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field.

"The purpose of the youth season is to recruit young waterfowl hunters, and for experienced waterfowlers to mentor these young hunters without the competition and distractions which can occur during the

regular season," said Mike Johnson, Game and Fish Department game management section leader. "Undoubtedly, the season is successful."

The daily bag limit, including species restrictions, and all other regulations that apply to the regular duck and goose hunting seasons apply. Youth ages 12 and older need to have passed a certified hunter education course and a general game and habitat license is required. A federal duck stamp is not required for youth under age 16.

Youth Pheasant Hunting

In 2005, lawmakers established the option for a youth pheasant hunting season on Saturday and Sunday preceding the regular pheasant season. At that time, legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 12-16 were allowed to hunt roosters statewide.

In 2007, the law was changed to allow the Game and Fish Department to establish a pheasant hunting season for youth. Now, to remain consistent with other youth hunting requirements, hunters ages 15 and younger are eligible to participate.

The daily bag limit, licensing requirements, and all other regulations for the regular pheasant season apply. A general game and habitat license is required, and youth ages 12 and older need to have passed a certified hunter education course.

An adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter in the field. The adult may not carry a firearm nor hunt any wildlife species.

Youth Deer Hunting

North Dakota's youth-only deer hunting season opens in mid-September and runs for nine-and-a-half days. First-time deer hunters ages 14 and 15 are eligible to participate at a reduced fee. The season is statewide, except for restricted licenses and units in western North Dakota. Each youth deer hunter must be accompanied by an adult while in the field.

The youth deer season has been in place for more than a decade and the Department continues to receive positive comments from both first-time hunters and their parents about the experience, Kreil said.

The youth deer season is the state's longest-running youth-only season, starting in 1994.



BOB FROHLICH

With all the opportunities afforded to budding North Dakota hunters, today is a good time to be a young hunter in the state.

Youth Turkey Hunting

Beginning in 2008, first-time spring wild turkey hunters ages 15 or younger will receive one spring wild turkey license valid for the regular hunting season.

To be eligible, the youth hunter must be 15 or younger on the opening day of the spring turkey season, and have never received a spring turkey license in North Dakota.

A general game and habitat license will be required, and youth ages 12 and older need to have passed a certified hunter education course.

An adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter in the field.

GREG FREEMAN is the Game and Fish Department's news editor.